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Dance of Viṣṇu: the spectacle of Tamil Ālvārs

RAJU KALIDOS

Is Viṣṇu Naṭarāja? yes, according to the Ālvārs (Vaiṣṇava saints of the Tamil country) Viṣṇu is Naṭarāja. The pan-Indian tradition associates two important forms of Viṣṇu with dance. They are Kāliyamardana and *rāsakriḍa*, merry making sports of Kṛṣṇa in the Gokula with *gopīs*. According to the *Cilappatikāram* (*Kaṭalātukātai* ll. 37–63) Viṣṇu presents *mal* while fighting with a demon, *alliyam* (a group dance) at the time rendition of Kaṁsa, *kuṭam* as Trivikrama, *pēti* as the eunuch Kāmadeva, an aspect of Viṣṇu, and *pāvai* is performed by Tiru, Śrīdevī, consort of Viṣṇu. This seems to be an ancient tradition (c. 5th century A.D.), reiterated by the Ālvārs. The Ālvārs are Vaiṣṇava mystics of the Tamil *bhakti* age, in total twelve in number. They have contributed enormously to literature, grouped under the heading, *Nālāyirativviyapirapantam* “4 000 Melodious Hymns” (cf. Hardy 1983: 247–50; Settar 1993: 223–40; Kalidos 1993: 181–88). The twelve Ālvārs are authors of 24 literary pieces, dated during the 5th–9th centuries A.D. The Ālvārs are grouped under three chronological heads as follows:

Early Ālvārs:	Poykai, Pūtam and Pēy	5th–6th century
Middle Ālvārs:	Nam, Maturakavi, Kulacēkarar, Tiruppāṇ, Toṇṭaratiṭṭopōṭi and Tirumaḷicai	7th–8th century
Later Ālvārs:	Periya, Āṇṭāl and Tirumaṅkai	8th–9th century

(cf. Zvelebil 1974: 101–104; Poykai to Pūtam 650–700, Āṇṭāl 9th century, including Toṇṭaratiṭṭopōṭi).

The Ālvārs in their works¹ view Viṣṇu as a dancer and associate many of the Lord’s

¹ The 24 works of the 12 Ālvārs are the following:

Ālvār	work	Abbreviation
Poykai	<i>Tiruvantāti</i> I	TI
Pūtam	<i>Tiruvantāti</i> II	TII
Pēy	<i>Tiruvantāti</i> III	TIII
Nam	1. <i>Tiruvācīriyam</i> 2. <i>Tiruviruttam</i> 3. <i>Periya Tiruvantāti</i> 4. <i>Tiruvāymoḷi</i>	ACI VIR PTT MOLI
Maturakavi	<i>Kāṇṇinunciruttāmpu</i>	KAN
Kulacēkarar	<i>Perumāl Tirumoḷi</i>	KPT
Tiruppāṇ	<i>Amalanātipirāṇ</i>	AMA
Toṇṭaratiṭṭopōṭi	1. <i>Tirumālai</i> 2. <i>Tiruppaḷḷieluuci</i>	TMM ELU
Tirumaḷicai	1. <i>Tiruccantaviruttam</i> 2. <i>Nānmukaṇ Tiruvantāti</i>	CAN NAN

incarnations with the dance theme. The literature of the Ālvārs as such has not formed part of a serious iconological study (cf. Zaehner 1962: 167–70), excepting those of the author and S. Settar (*supra*). The present attempt strives to cull out the relevant data on Viṣṇu as a King of Dancers.

Viṣṇu being a dancer par excellence a number of epithets are coined by the Ālvārs which are pointers to the *naṭaḥ* aspect. These epithets have their roots in words like *āṭu* and *kūttu*, meaning a dance. The most striking epithet is: Kuttāṭavallaveṅkō, *kūttu* “dance”, *āṭu* “perform”, *valla* “able”, *em* “our”, *kō* “king”; giving scope to coin the phrase Naṭarāja “King of Dancers” (NAC 3.6). Āṭuvāṇ “Dancer” (PTM 4.2.5) (cf. Āṭavallāṇ of the Śaivas in Kalidos 1996: 16) or Kūṭṭaṇ (PTM 2.1.9, 4.1.9, 5.1.1, 9.5.9, 10.1.9, PTML ll. 209–11), Catirmūrtti “Lord who Dances” (MOLI 8.10.9), Kūttavammāṇ “Dancing Lord” (MOLI 8.6.6), *Māyakkūṭṭaṇ* “Illusionary Dancer” (MOLI 8.5. all hymns), Āṭumammāṇ “Father who Dances” (MOLI 1.8.1) or Kūttavappaṇ (MOLI 6.2.11), Āṭaṇṇaravaiyāṇ “Bird (?) who Dances” (PTM 9.9.10, MOLI 8.2.4), *Aṇaṇku* “Spirit” who dances (MOLI 1.6.3–4), Kuḷakaṇ (MOLI 3.6.7), Vittakaṇ (TM 3.9.9) and so on. The enigmatic phrase, Neyyāṭi (PTM 1.1.5), also appears.² Kṣṣṇa as Gopāla is a dancer. The phrases, Kūṭṭaṇ–Kōvalaṇ (MOLI 10.1.6) and Kōvalar–Kūṭṭaṇ (PTM 9.5.8) appear. Most celebrated among the dances of Viṣṇu, in the Ālvārs’ literature, is a particular mode called *kuṭakkūttu* (elaborated below) in which the Lord presents a recital, carrying pots on his head. Several epithets are coined after this mode. They are Kuṭakkūṭṭaṇ (MOLI 3.6.3,7), Kuṭamāṭi (NAC 13.2, PTM 3.6.8, 5.5.6, 6.3.9, 6.9.4, MOLI 4.2.5), Kuṭakkūṭṭar (MOLI 9.7.1), Kuṭakkūṭṭaṇār (MOLI 4.2.5), Kuṭakkūṭṭavammāṇ (MOLI 2.5.11, 8.6.5), Kuṭamāṭukūṭṭaṇ (PTM 2.9.6, NAC 10.7, MOLI 4.10.10, 8.5.6. 10.1.11) and Kuṭamāṭiyakūṭṭaṇ (PTM 7.3.3), all meaning the Dancer who enacts the *kuṭam*. These epithets provide a very strong basis for the *naṭaḥ* aspect of Viṣṇu. The spectacular vision of the Ālvārs is that Viṣṇu is Naṭarāja, Āṭuvāṇ or Āṭavallāṇ.

The popular terminologies, used to mean dance, are *āṭṭam* (variants *āṭu* and *āṭi*), *naṭam* or *naṭṭam*, *kūttu*, *kirīṭai* and *vilaiyāṭṭu*. The term *catir* (MOLI 8.10.9) is rarely used, meaning a dance or dance-drama, popular with the folk. *Āṭu* (NAC 10.5, PTM 1.5.1–7), is used redundantly. *Naṭam* (PTM 1.5.6) or *naṭṭam* (NAC 12.5) is a synonym. The Lord’s dance is *tūyanaṭam* “immaculate dance” (PTM 1.5.6) which he performs, *ceytu* (*naṭaṇceytu* PTM 3.9.7). Performance also requires training and so it is cultivated, *naṭampayil*, *payil* “training” (PTM 4.3.4). Dance comes by training and hence the phrase, *payinṛāṭu* “learn and dance”

Periya	1. <i>Tirumoli</i>	TM
	2. <i>Tiruppallāṇṭu</i>	PAL
Āṇṭāl	1. <i>Tiruppāvai</i>	PAV
	2. <i>Nācciyar Tirumoli</i>	NAC
Tirumāṅkai	1. <i>Periya Tirumoli</i>	PTM
	2. <i>Tirukkuṟuntāṇṭakam</i>	KUR
	3. <i>Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam</i>	NET
	4. <i>Tiruvelukūṟirukkai</i>	TVK
	5. <i>Ciriyatirumaṭal</i>	CTML
	6. <i>Periyatirumaṭal</i>	PTML

The abbreviations are followed in the text.

² Cf. the hymns of Kāraikkālammaiyaṛ in Rajarajan 1997. *Ney* is clarified butter, likely to be a metaphor for matter in its purified state. The link between dance and *ney* may allegorically stand for a dance in its pure form or a cultivated dance, coming under any of the *nāṭyaśāstras*; cf. *tūyanaṭam* PTM 1.5.6.

(NAC 10.6). Such a dancer is Naṭampayinṇāṇaṭaṇ “Lord who cultivated dance” (CAN 38, 86). The recital was a great event and so the dance is called *mānaṭam* “Great Dance” (NAC 10.6).³ *Kūttu* is also a dance, pointed out by the phrases, *kūttāṭṭu* (NAC 5.2) and *kūttāṭṭu* (NET 16). The dance is also a group performance, *kūṭiyāṭi* (*kūṭu* “mingle” PTM 4.4.7). It might as well be a sport or holy sport, *tiruviḷaiyāṭṭu* (NAC 9.3). *Nāṭakam* (MOLI 5.2.4), strictly a drama (IM, VIII, Pl. V), is also dance and used with the prefix, *kunikkum* “stoop (to perform)” (MOLI 5.2.4). *Kiṇṭai* (TM 2.9.11) is a sport (Skt. *kriḍā*), linked with Kṛṣṇa’s *rāsālilās*, erotic games with *gopīs*. It involved dancing with the *gopīs*. The rich vocabulary, bearing on dance, used by the Ālvārs, proves beyond doubt that the dance motif was a familiar theme with the Vaiṣṇavas.

There are clues to certain specific dance types. *Marakkāl* (*kāl* “leg”, *maram* “wood”) was a folk dance, still prevalent in country festivals, in which men and women have artificial legs while presenting a recital. The *Cilappatikāram* associates this form with Māyavaḷ, i.e. Devī. The Ālvārs consider Viṣṇu as a performer of this mode, *marakkāl kūttāṭṭu* (PTM 11.5.6). Another interesting ancient Tamil dance was *kuravai*, very much celebrated in the *Cilappatikāram*, and linked with *āycciyar* (Skt. *gopīs*). There is a separate section of the book on *Āycciyarkuravai* in which the cowherds of Maturai perform to solicit the blessings of Kṛṣṇa. It is a group dance, perhaps rendered by men and women by forming circles and clasping hands (Subrahmanyam 1990: 295–96). The *kuravai* dance is linked with the dances of Viṣṇu (PTM 2.5.4, 9.8.6, 10.8.9). It seems several types of dances were familiar to the Vaiṣṇava tradition as there is a talk about *palnaṭam* “many a dance” (PTM 4.10.3). *Ellī* was a type (*sandhyātāṇḍava*? “[evening] twilight recital”, earlier appearing in the *Cilappatikāram* (Kalidos 1996: 19) and noted by the Ālvārs (MOLI 8.6.1). Dance was a cultivated art as they talk of *payinṇu* “learn” or “train (oneself in the art)” (TII 46). In group dances the hands were clasped, *kōttāṭi* (*kōttu* “clasp” TI 54). In Tamil literary tradition, young ones are associated with childish pranks, called *āṭṭam*. Kṛṣṇa is supposed to have performed *ceṅkirai* (PTM 1.5. all hymns) and *cappāṇi* (PTM 1.6.1–5). In such plays children clasp their hands (cf. *kōttāy* PTM 1.6.1, 2–5), toss the heads and move the body joyfully. These are natural performances and have nothing to do with the canonic types of dance.

When compared with the Śaiva tradition, the Vaiṣṇavas have not left any legacy of *sthalas* (Mevissen 1996: 42) where dances of Viṣṇu are important. In this respect, the Śaiva notion of *ampalam* or *cirṇampalam* “Little House” or *poṇṇampalam* “Golden House” of Naṭarāja of Citamparam (Younger 1986; cf. the “Sacred Arena” Narayanan 1995: 190–93) may be mentioned. There is no such exclusive stage of dance for Viṣṇu but whenever the latter is said to present a dance recital, he is associated with a stage. Words like *araṅkam* (KPT 1.4, NET 19), *maṇṇu* (PTM 10.9.2), *maṇṇam* PTM 11.2.1, 4.5.7, MOLI 4.2.2), *kūṭam* (PTM 4.5.1), *cōlai* “grove” (PTM 1.9.8, TMM 14, 17, 32) and *paṭukāṭu* “dense forest” (TM 3.6.8) are used to denote the stage where Viṣṇu performs dances. All these are common to the Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas. The word, *ampalam*, is not in Vaiṣṇava usage. *Araṅkam* is typical of the Vaiṣṇavas. It is more a bed-chamber for Raṅganātha than a stage for dance but interestingly the reclining Lord himself is perceived as a *Kūṭṭaṇ* in the

³ This phrase is used by the Nāyaṇmār in connection with the *ūrdhvatāṇḍavam* of Śiva (cf. Kalidos 1996, 1996a). Trivikrama’s striding posture is akin to the *ūrdhvatāṇḍavam* (Kalidos 1984: 17–20). Interestingly, Trivikrama is supposed to present a dance recital at the time of his cosmic striding activity (TM 2.5.7, 4.3.4, MOLI 7.5.6).

Cittirakūṭam of Tillai (Kalidos 1997). So both the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Lords of Tillai, housed in the *Cirampalam* and *Cittirakūṭam* are Naṭarājas. At this place Viṣṇu vigorously trains himself in dance, *payilaraṅkam* (*payil* “to train” oneself) (KPT 1.4). The interesting phrase, *paṭukāṭu*, gives two different connotations to the topography of the arena from the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava point of usage. It is a barren tract, a crematorium, for the Śaivas but the “pathless woods” of the Vaiṣṇavas. It is a *cōlai* where “none intrudes” but peacocks, cuckoos, birds and where harmless animals live in heavenly harmony. It is the Garden of Eden, the Brindāvana, which strikingly contrasts with the ecological setting of Śiva’s wild forest, infested with jackals, owls and poisonous snakes (Kalidos 1996: 27–29, Fischer 1979: figs. 9–10, 15–17). We will return to this point. The *maṇṇu* (NET 16) in Vaiṣṇava tradition is associated with a *maram* “tree”, *maṇṇamaram* (NET 16), a reminder that in the past stages were hypaethral, set under shades of a tree. Māl (Skt. Viṣṇu) presents his recital in a group, *kuravai* in the *maṇṇu*, *maṇṇil kuravai piṇainta Māl* (PTM 11.2.1). There is an erotic undertone in the expression as the word, *piṇainta* “congress” (*infra*) is a naive pointer of *rāśakrīḍa*. Āṇṭāl in NAC gives a classical orientation to the Tantric idioms in her efforts to discover Kṛṣṇa as an unearthly sweetheart of a mundane aspirant (Kalidos 1997b).

Viṣṇu in iconographical illustrations is usually presented in three basic modes; *āsana* (T. *irunta*), *sayana* (T. *kiṭanta*) and *sthānaka* (T. *niṇṇa*) (Kalidos 1993: 196). Nammālvār talks of *naṭantu* “walk” (MOLI 6.9.3) as a mode. Tirumaṅkai takes into account all four and adds *kuṇintum-nāṭakam*, i.e. dance, as a posture of Viṣṇu. To quote,

Kiṭantu miruntu meḷuntu kiṭam palapāṭi

Naṭantum paṇantum kuṇintum nāṭakam ceykiṇṇavē (PTM 5.2.4)

The Lord is a dramatist who enacts *nāṭakam* “stage play” by *kiṭantu*, *iruntu* and *eḷuntu* “get up” (i.e. standing dynamically, cf. Bautze-Picron 1985: 437–81), *naṭantu*, *paṇantu* “fly”⁴ and *kuṇintu* “to stoop” (i.e. dance). All these activities take place to the tune of several musical recitals, *kiṭam pala pāṭi* (cf. PTM 5.2.4); *kiṭam* “music”, *pala* “many” and *pāṭi* “sing”. Music is inborn with the Lord and so he is invoked with the epithet, *ēlicaīyīṇ cuvai* (MOLI 10.8.8) “melody of the seven musics”.⁵ Dance being an accepted form of the Lord, the Ālvārs associate several of the iconic representations of Viṣṇu with *ṇṭya*. Most important among them are *kuṭakkūttu*, *rāśakrīḍa*, Kāliyamardana and Govardhanadhāri. Among the other forms are Śeṣaśāyī, Trivikrama, Vāmana, Varāhamūrti, Venkaṭeśvara, and the presiding gods of Araṅkam, Tirukkōṭṭiyūr and so on. Several forms of Kṛṣṇa dance. They are Gopāla as Lord of cows, Kṛṣṇa as a child, Gopivastrāpaharaṇa, Yamalārjunabhaṅga, Kuvalayapiḍa-vadham, *Rāśakrīḍa*, Kṛṣṇa eating butter, Kṛṣṇa killing Kāmsa and so on. It is very interesting to find that the Ālvārs view the most virulent *avatāra*, Nṛsiṃha in reclining (PAV 23, Zuebeil 1974: 103–104) and dancing aspects (PTM 3.3.8). This projection adds a new dimension to the personality of Viṣṇu. The Nāyaṇmār in their corpus, the *Tēvāram* (5.182.3, 6.295,8), view Harihara as a dancer (Kalidos 1996: 24–25).

⁴ The enigmatic phrase, Āṭarparavaiyāṇ (PTM 9.9.10, MOLI 8.2.4), cited in the foregoing account will have to be recapitulated here. Among those personalities who are connected with Viṣṇu, *Garuḍa* is the King-bird who could fly swiftly. He is an *amśavatāra* of Viṣṇu (Kalidos 1986: 183n). *Haṁsa*, the swan, is an incarnation of Viṣṇu in the *kṛtayuga*, also called Yajña in the 11th *skanda* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Mani 1996: 306).

⁵ The Lord is invoked with the words, *iṇṇicaiyāṇavāṇē* (PTM 6.1.7) “Thou music incarnate” (cf. Skt. *svaramaya* or *saptasvaramaya*). *Svarah* (*Viṣṇusahasrāṇāma* 25, 123) means “omniscient”.

Tirumaṅkai Ālvār finds the Lord of *Cittirakūṭam*, i.e. the abode of Viṣṇu in the Citamparam temple complex (Kalidos 1997), in Nṛsiṃha form. It is known that the Lord, i.e. *mūlabera*, in the *Cittirakūṭam* was Śeṣaśāyī through the ages. Tirumaṅkai adds that the Lord at *Cittirakūṭam* emerges in the form of a lion with burning eyes and his 1 000 shoulders dancing to dislodge the demon whose name is gold, i.e. *hiranya* “golden”. To quote,

Poṅkiyamarilorukāl poṇpeyarōṇai veruva
 Aṅkavaṇākamaḷaintiṭṭu āyirantōḷeluntāṭa
 Painkaṇiraṇṭerikāṇṇa niṇṭa veyiṭṭōṭupēlvāy
 Cinkavuvuvil varuvāṇ cittirakūṭattullāṇē (PTM 3.3.8)

In the cited hymn, the following phrases are worth explaining: *poṇpeyarōṇ* “he with the name of gold” (i.e. *Hiranya*), *āyirantōḷeluntāṭa* “1 000 shoulders rise up to dance”, *Cinkavuvuvilvaruvāṇ* “He (Viṣṇu) comes in form of Lion”. This is an important theme because in the literature of India, Tirumaṅkai is one who visualized Nṛsiṃha with dancing shoulders. That is to say Nṛsiṃha is dancing. The two Nāmakkal cave temples provide clues to the emerging Nṛsiṃha from the root Viṣṇu. The original Viṣṇu is iconographically either Vaikuṇṭhamūrti or Śeṣaśāyī. The Raṅganātha cave of Nāmakkal finds the *mūlabera* reclining while Nṛsiṃha is posted in a *koṣṭha* near the Lord’s feet. Similarly in the Nṛsiṃha cave it is Nṛsiṃha who occupies the *cella* but Vaikuṇṭhamūrti appears at a strategic place, naively meaning the *avatāras* proceed from him. There are rare images of dancing Nṛsiṃha (Fig. 3). It has been earlier proved with authentic professional skill that the image of Nṛsiṃha-Hiranya *yuddham* in the *Daśāvatāra* (Cave XV) of Ellora (cf. Berkson 1988: 207–29) is in dancing mode.⁶ Gauri Parimoo demonstrated the postures of both Nṛsiṃha and Hiranya at the Ellora conference (cf. Parimoo 1988) to the tune of *nāṭyaśāstra*. It is an important contribution to find a visual justification for the theoretical notion of Tirumaṅkai (Parimoo 1988: 318–31, Pls. 45–47). The author fails to cite any literary source, excepting the *nāṭyaśāstras*, to substantiate her important discovery. The date of the cave according to K.V. Soundararajan (1981: 9, cf. Spink 1967: 10) is the mid-8th century A.D. which gets closer to the time of later Ālvārs who popularised the dancing theme (see Annexure I). There is an image of Ugra-Nṛsiṃha in dancing mode (fig. 3) in the Paithan village, near Aurangābād, maybe of the Yādava period (Kalidos 1977b: Pl XXIXa). An image of Nṛsiṃha in the Vṛddhāchalam temple of the Vijayanagara period is also interesting (Kalidos 1977b: Pl. XXIXb, cf. Meister, 1986: 237).

Varāha, the Wild Boar, is a dancer. There are two important places in the *Nālāyiram* where the Ēṇam “Boar” is supposed to dance. Periyālvār in his TM (2.10.10) notes the Ēṇam who rescued the Earth, *taraṇi iṭantāṇ*. It is added that the Boar was hued like rain-drenched clouds, preyed in wild forest, played at dancing and at last rescued the Mother Earth. To quote,

Vāṇatteḷunta maḷaimukilpōl eṅkuṇ
 Kāṇattumēyntu kaḷittu vīlaiyāṇi
 Ēṇatturuvāy iṭantavimmaṇṇiṇai ...

⁶ An image of Nṛsiṃha engaged in Hiranya *vadham* in the Hoyaleśvara temple at Halebidu is also possibly in dancing mode (cf. Settar 1991: Pl. 98).

The phrase, *kaḷittu vīlaiyāṭi* (cf. *Rasa* 1986: fig. 165), would mean play the dance with alacrity. The hymn suggests the venue is *kāṇakam* “forest”, a metaphor for the cosmos, and so He is the Cosmic Boar. The Lord incarnated himself as *Ēṇam* to save the Earth, again a metaphor for the evils haunting the earth. The other reference to Varāha as Dancer is in the PTML ll. 209–11 (cf. Goswamy & Fischer 1990: Pls. 73, 105). To quote,

Maṇṇivvakaliṭattai māmutunīr tāṇvīḷuṅka
Piṇṇumōrēṇamāyp pukkaḷaḷaimaruppiṇ
Koṇṇavillum kūnutimēl vaitteṭutta kūṭṭaṇai

The Boar here is invoked with the epithet, Kūṭṭaṇ “Dancer”. It is added that the Earth was engulfed by the waters of the primeval ocean. Thereupon the Lord incarnated himself in Boar form and lifted the Earth by the tip of his snout. He performed this miracle by presenting a dance recital. Aptly the performer is Kūṭṭaṇ.

Varāhamūrti in Indian art through the ages is depicted in a particular pose. He has one of his legs, usually the left, pushed forward as though in *ālīḍha* attitude (Ions 1975: fig. p. 37). Desai 1973: figs. 59–63). The posture is full of dynamism and may be what the Āḷvārs call *naṭantu* “walk” (PTM 5.2.4 *supra*) or in a dramatic setting of the enactment in dancing mode. In Hoysāla sculptures the Lord Boar finds the demon, Hiraṇyākṣa, trampled at his gyrating legs. There is an interesting headless Varāha in the Matahurā museum (Desai 1973: fig. 58, Joshi 1965: 113–19) in which the legs are set apart as though in *ardhamāṇḍali* posture with the *pūrvahastas* in *kaṭihasta* mode. This is like a dancing mode which is different from other models of the subject. The hymn cited above (TM 2.10.10) notes the Wild Boar roaming about the forest, leaping joyfully and playing mirthfully his movements would be akin to an orgiastic dance (fig. 8). So the association of dance with the Boar is not a misnomer. Few of the images of Vāhāhī, reported by Donaldson (1995: fig. 20, see also Punja 1991: 285 fig.) are interesting in this context (cf. Nṛsiṃhī above).

The great Āḷvār, Tirumaṅkai, in a hymn cited above (PTM 5.2.4) talks of *paraṇtu* “flying”. In Hindu mythology there are a few birds which fly in the service of the gods. They are *haṁsa* “swan” (cf. *Haṁsāya namaḥ* VA 28), vehicle of Brahmā (cf. images of Liṅgodbhavamūrti in Ellora Caves XV and XVI), *Jaṭāyu* in the Rāmāyaṇa (Ions 1975: 37 fig.) and *Garuḍa*, the mount of Viṣṇu (Ions 1975: 37 fig.), *Kāmadhenu*, the celestial all-offering Cow, is also fitted with wings (Kalidos 1988: 99) and supposed to fly. Even now in country festivals cows are decorated and led by acrobats who make the beasts dance with the stimulating shout, *āṭu* “dance”.⁷ The beasts leap and gyrate the body, tossing heads and swinging tails. This is the dance of the cow. In medieval art there are a few interesting sculptural illustrations wherein *Garuḍa* is flying and at the same time in dancing mode. There are a few specimens in the Hoysāla art of Belūr and Halebidu. These images illustrate (1) *Garuḍa* lifting a boa-constrictor, his prey, (2) Karivarada, and (3) Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa with Satyabhāma, seated on the king-bird, in a mission to kill Narakāsura.⁸ It is interesting to find in all these cases *Garuḍa* in levitation and at the same time in *ālīḍha* attitude (fig. 5).

⁷ Sometimes men and women also wear masks of cows, get into an artificial animal frame and dance.

⁸ An image from the chariot of the Śāṅṅapāṇisvāmī temple at Kumbhakoṇam has been reported (Kalidos 1989: fig. 46) wherein *Garuḍa* is an *ālīḍhāsana* but not dancing. It seems as though he has landed and helps the armed Satyabhāma to kill the demon.

The flexion is *atibhaṅga*. He is anthropomorphic but fitted with wings and aculeate nose. As he flies, the king-bird is dancing. These images also stand as proof of the fact that *ālīḍha* is a posture, having something to do with dance as it has been pointed out in connection with Varāha (*supra*). Incidentally, it may be noted that S. Settar's (1991, Vol. II) profile of Hoyśāla sculptures does not include these interesting pieces.

Nammālvār uses the interesting epithet, Āṭarpaṇavaiyāṇ (MOLI 8.2.4), followed by Tirumaṅkai (PTM 9.9.10), meaning the Dancing Bird. Nammālvār talks with reference to Teṅkuḷantai, one among the 108 *divyakṣetras*, where the Māyakkūṭṭai is the Dancing Bird. In case of the latter, the hymn is addressed to the Lord of Tirumāliṛuṇḱōlai (Rajajaran 1995: chap. I). Now the question is: who is this Dancing Bird? could it be *Garuḍa* who according to the *Śrī Mahādevī Bhāṭgavatam* is one among the *amśāvatāras* of Viṣṇu (Kalidos 1986: 186). But in case of the two citations, the hymns are directly addressed to the presiding Lords of Teṅkuḷantai and Tirumāliṛuṇḱōlai. There is no mention of an *amśāvatāra*. So, our presumption is that both must pertain to a major *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Before entering into a discussion on the subject, the hymns concerned may be cited:

Māṭakkoṭi matil Teṅkuḷantaivaṅkuṭapāl niṇṇa Māyakkūṭṭai
Āṭarpaṇavai yuyurtta velpōr āḷivalavaṇai ... (MOLI 8.2.4)

Tēṭarkariyavaṇait Tirumāliṛuṇḱōlai niṇṇa
Āṭarpaṇavaiyāṇai ... (PTM 9.9.10)

The MOLI avers that the Māyakkūṭṭai stands at the fortified city of Teṅkuḷantai in its northern side and that he is the Dancing Bird, engaged in a tough battle.⁹ According to the PTM it is very difficult to discover the Lord who stands at Tirumāliṛuṇḱōlai as the Dancing Bird.

Apart from the birds (*supra*), famous in Hindu mythology, there is a form of Nṛsiṅha, called Aṣṭamukhaghaṇḍhabheruṇḱa-Nṛsiṅha (AGN) (Kalidos 1987: 289–91, 1997b: Pl. I, Rajajaran 1993: 177–80, figs. 1–2, Gopalakrishnan 1997: 73–88) who combines the features of man, animal (*siṅha*) and bird (*gaṇḍhabheruṇḱa*). The iconographical features of the eight-headed bird, a corollary to Śarabhamūrti, is elaborated in the *Śrīttatvanidhi* (1.2.60, reported by Rajajaran 1993). Very rare specimens of the later Vijayanagara period are reported (Kalidos 1987, Rajajaran 1993, Gopalakrishnan 1997) which are mostly seated. And yet, the painting in the Śrīraṅgam temple is of particular interest (Rajajaran 1993: fig. 1, Kalidos 1997b: Pl. I) which even if seated is full of dynamism (fig. 12) ready for a dancing concert. Again if Nṛsiṅha could present an ecstatic dance recital, why not the macrocosmic AGN?

What is more interesting, the Āḷakarkōyil temple for Saundararāja accommodates a rare image on the subject. The *garbhagṛha* of the temple is circular and surrounded by a square *maṇḍapa* fitted with a parapet for circumambulation.¹⁰ The walls of the *maṇḍapa* are decorated with stucco images on top. These are of great interest and unreported yet in any scholarly study, excepting Rajajaran (1995). There is a running panel of Śarabha-AGN

⁹ The location of the image on the north is an important idea because Śiva-Nāṭarāja in his abodes at Citamparam, Maturai and Nelvēli is facing south. Viṣṇu may also face the south, falling in line with the *ampalakkūṭṭai*-Nāṭarāja.

¹⁰ For a detailed account see R. K. K. Rajajaran 1995.

conflict wherein the latter is full of dynamism and in a mode akin to dance. I am of the view that the ideas aired by the Ālvārs, Nam and Tirumāṅkai, are possibly clues to the dancing AGN who was Lord of Teṅkuḷantai and Tirumāliṛuṇḱōlai, the Great Dancer in a world of illusion, the Māyakkūṭṭaṇ.

In the history of Indian iconography, Śarabhamūrti and AGN are two outstanding examples of sectarian rivalry (cf. Gopalakrishnan (1997). Śarabhamūrti was an antithesis of Nṛsiṃha (Kalidos 1981) and AGN of Śarabhamūrti. That means AGN could have come into the picture only after the emergence of Śarabhamūrti during the later Cōḷa period (Sivaramamurti 1976: 98). If this is so, how could AGN find a place in the pre-Cōḷa literature of the Ālvārs? There seems to be an anachronism here. Yet there is a case in favour of our proposition because the Nāyaṇmār talk with reference to a number of sectarian forms like Kaṅkāḷar (Skt. Kaṅkālamūrti) in the *Tēvāram* (1.71.1, 1.130.3), the Śaiva corpus of the contemporary period, who visualize Śiva as a destroyer of a few of the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu like *Kūrma* and *Varāha*.¹¹ According to the Nāyaṇmār, Śiva plucked the tusk of *Ēṇam* and wore it as a garland (*Tēvāram* 1.73.10) and the *Āmai* was also part of the decoration (*Tēvāram* 1.1.2). *Āmai* is *Kūrma* and *Ēṇam* *Varāha*. So, it is quite natural that the Ālvārs discovered the Āṭarparavai who could deal with the challengers of *Āmai* and *Ēṇam*. There are rare iconographical illustrations of Śiva who dispensed with *Kūrma* and *Varāha* (Rajaraman 1995a: 129–34, fig. 90, Kalidos 1989: fig. 80).

Vāmana was a dancer according to Nammālvār. A decad (MOLI 8.5) commences with the words, *Māyakkūṭṭā Vāmaṇa* “Vāmana, thou the illusionary dancer”. Then the mystic goes to add, “what a pleasure, it is to witness the *kūttu*, thou performed as Vāmana” (*Vāmaṇaṇāy ceytakūṭṭukaḷ kaṇṭume* MOLI 7.5.6). In the cited passage, the word for dance is in the plural, *kūttu-kaḷ*. It may also be noted that the *kūttu* in the present context may either be a dance or a comic play, involving humour. Perhaps the tricks played by Vāmana to elongate himself into Trivikrama, the Tall One, are poetically pointed out by this expression.¹² Vāmana was a Dwarf and a dwarf presenting a dancing recital may appear frivolous. But in Indian artistic tradition, there is no hiatus in the dance of a dwarf. We have several examples of dwarf *gaṇas*, posed in dancing modes in the cave temples of the Cāḷukyas, Rāṣṭrakūṭas and the later medieval structural temples (Kreisel 1986: Pl. A27). Vāmana is also supposed to play a childish dance, called *cappāṇi* (TM 1.6.1). He is decorated with ornaments made of rubies, molten gold, corals and pearls. He played the *cappāṇi* with little hands for which the reward was the earth (T. *kāṇi*). Periyālvār has dedicated a decad to the play of *cappāṇi* (TM 1.6); supposed to be enacted by Kṛṣṇa (vv. 1–5), Pārthasārathi (v. 6), Trivikrama (v. 7), Dāśarathi-Rāma (v. 8), Nṛsiṃha (v. 9) and Mohini (v. 10). These evoke humour and the spirit of a classical dance as in case of *tāṇḍava* is lost. Periyālvār while extolling the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa concludes a few of the hymns with the words, *ēḷulakamuṭaiyā yāṭukavāṭukavē* (TM 1.5.10). The dance under discussion is *cenṅirai*, another type of children’s play. The phrase, *ēḷulakamuṭaiyāy* “Lord of seven worlds”, is significant and it

¹¹ Iconographically Kaṅkālamūrti and Bhikṣāṭana are similar forms. The former is differentiated from the latter by the *kaṅkāladanda* that he carries, placed on his shoulders. The *daṇḍa* is supposed to be fitted with the bones of Viṣṇu’s *avatāras* (Kalidos 1989: 83–84). Early images are found in the Pallava temples in Kāñcīpuram, the Kailāsanātha housing a piece in one of the secondary chapels as a cult image in its south western corner.

¹² In fact Vāmana played a deceitful trick to overcome Mahābali and so the Ālvārs call him a *vañcaṇ* (MOLI 3.8.2), a deceiver.

may refer to Trivikrama who measured the worlds as a sequel to the Vāmanāvatāra event. It has been pointed out earlier by the author that the postures of Trivikrama in three modes (i.e., leg lifted up to the knee or hip or shoulder levels, cf. Rao 1971: 164) may have something to do with dance, especially the *ūrdhwapāda* which is the equal of *ūrdhvatāṇḍava* or *lalāṭatilakam* performance of Śiva (Kalidos 1984: 20 (figs. 8–9)). Thus, Vāmana and Trivikrama are dancers in the file of Ālvārs.

The ideal hero for the dancing subject is Kṛṣṇa (Archer 1957: 74, Dallapiccola 1982: 13, fig. 3). And Kṛṣṇa is the ideal theme of artists from the early “Kṛṣṇa Pillars” (Stadtner 1987) to the later Kaṅgra (Randhawa 1960, 1982, Bautze 1983) and Himālayan (Seth 1976) paintings. Most of the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa are linked with dance motifs. The themes are Kāliyamardana, *Rāsakriḍā* (Archer 1957: Pl. 22), Govardhanadhāri, Gopāla, Gopīvastrāpaharaṇa, *jalakriḍā* in Yamunā, Yamalārjunabhaṅga, Kuvalayapīḍa-*vaḍham*, Santāna Gopāla, Kaṁsa-*vaḍham* and so on. Talking in general terms, i.e. without hinting at any specific *līlā*, it can be added that Kṛṣṇa is the performer of *marakkāl-kūttu* which he staged at a *maṇṇu*. It was enjoyed by those who were present. To quote,

... kaṇṭavar tam kaṇkaḷippa
Maṇṇil marakkāl kūttāṭiṇṇāṇ kāṇōm
Maṇṇil marakkāl kūttāṭiṇṇāṇākilum
eṇṇumaṇiyēṇ (PTM 11.8.6) (fig. 7)

The Lord was happy at his own performance in the *maṇṇu*, located below a tree, *maṇṇilmarakkūttāṭi makiṇtāy* (NET 16). The child-Kṛṣṇa who steals butter is a much extolled literary motif. The child is either fed by Yaśodā or steals butter from houses of *gopīs*. What is fun for boys is suffering for the *gopīs*. So, a *gopī* laments as follows:

Kālaiyeḷuṇṭu kaṭaintavimmōr viṭkap pōkiṇṇēṇ kaṇṭēpōṇēṇ
Mālainaṇṭuṇkuṇci nantaṇṇamakaṇallāl māṇṇuvantārumillai
Mēlaiyakattu naṇkāy kāṇmiṇkaḷ veṇṇeyēyaṇṇirunta
Pālumpatiṇkuṭaṇkaṇṭillēṇ pāviyēṇēṇ ceykēṇceykeṇō (PTM 10.7.2)

“I got up early in the morning and went to sell churned buttermilk. In the evening I found ten pots of butter and milk missing (in my house). None but the son of Nanda came here. You maiden of the upper house, tell me what shall this cursed *gopī* do?”¹³ And the poet goes further to add,

Vēḷimalaiyiruntālotta veṇṇeyai vāriṇṭuṇkiyittu
Kaḷvaṇuṇaṇkukiṇṇāṇ vantukāṇmiṇkaḷ kaiyēllāmney (PTM 10.7.3)

“He has gulped all the butter which was heaped like a silver hillock. See how the thief sleeps, the hands smeared with clarified butter”. Having consumed his share of food, the mischievous one presented a *kūttu* (VIR 21). The butter-eater is called Kūttavappaṇ, the Father of Dance (MOLI 6.2.11), another important epithet, the equal of Naṭarāja.

Kṛṣṇa is a tender of domestic animals like cows and so the Good Cowherd. He is called

¹³ For a detailed account of the mythology of Kṛṣṇa, reflected in the hymns of the Ālvārs see Kalidos 1986a: 50–57.

Āyarkaḷ-pērēru “Big Bull of Cowherds” who is the Lord of seven worlds and presents a dance recital, lifting one leg. The dance is named *ceṇkīrai*. To quote,

Āyarkaḷpērērē yātukavātukavē “Dance, thou Big Bull of Cowherds dance” (TM 1.5.1–7)

Ēḷulakamuṭaiyā yātukavātukavē “Thou, container of the seven worlds dance” (TM 1.5.8–10)

(āṭu) orukālōṭu ceṇkīrai “(dance) with one leg, the *ceṇkīrai* (type)” (TM 1.5.1)

The Lord is Lion among the Āyars (*gopas*), *ciṇiya ciṇkam* (TM 3.3.5, PAV 23). He roams about the forest, taking cows to their pastures and at dusk leads them back to the pen. He wears the flowers of *kārkkōṭa*. His mien is as soft as the plumage of a peahen. He is invited to take a bath and then dine, giving a dance recital, *āṭiyamutu cey* (TM 3.3.5). Māliṟuñcōlai (med. Aḷakarkōyil) it seems, was inhabited by the *kōvalar* or *āyar* and *kuṟavar* (the gypsies of hill).¹⁴ They tune the music of hill country, called *kuṟiñci*, sing songs (*pā* “song”) and learn the dance to propitiate the Lord. To quote,

Kōvalar Kōvintaṇaik kuṟamātarkaḷ paṇkuṟiñci

Pāvoli pāṭi naṭam payil Māliṟuñcōlaiyitē (TM 4.3.4)

(cf. Khandalavala 1958: fig. 2, Archer 1960: Pl. 64)

The dance of devotees was a common sight. So, Āḷvār Nam adds “we dance and create a scene”, *nāṇkaḷ kūṭṭāṭi niṇṟārppa* (MOLI 9.1.4). At Tirumōkūr, a *divyakṣetra* near Āṇaimalai in Maturai, the devotees go around the temple in *pradakṣiṇa* and present a dance. To quote,

Tirumōkūr . . . kōyilai valaṇceytu ikkāṭutum kūttē (MOLI 10.1.5)

The Lord is Catirmūrṭi¹⁵ (MOLI 8.10.9) who eradicates evils which haunt the *devas*. And so Kṛṣṇa is associated with a number of demons whom he dislodged with the help of Balarāma, his elder brother.

The two sons of Kubera, Nalakubara and Maṇigrīva were cursed to be trees which stood at the backyard of Kṛṣṇa’s residence in Gokula. The Lord rolled a mortar against the trees which fell down. They emerged from the trees and were redeemed. The name of the tree topped by the Lord is *kuruntam*. The mystic adds, “let us join the feller, present a dance and celebrate the event”. To quote Periyāḷvār,

Kuruntamoṇṇocittāṇṭōṭuṇ ceṇṇu kūṭiyāṭi viḷācceytu (TM 4.4.7)

Viḷācceytu means hold a festival. The celebrated event is associated with Tirukkōṭṭiyūr (Skt. Tirukoṣṭiyūr), a *divyakṣetra* in the Pāṇḍya country.

The host of demons who tested the time of Kṛṣṇa were sent by his own maternal uncle, Kaṁsa (T. Kañcaṇ, literally “miser”), King of Mathurā who had deposed his own father and usurped the throne. Having done away with the host of demons, Kṛṣṇa with Balarāma proceeded to Mathurā to encounter the arch-demon itself at his base. And when they entered the place wild elephants were commissioned to kill the boys. The mammoths, called Kuvalayapīḍa, were very powerful. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma plucked the tusks of the

¹⁴ The *āyar* are a caste in Tamilnadu, popularly called *kōṇār*. In recent times, they claim to be *yādavas*, falling in line with the pan-Indian caste-based political movements. Concentrated in Maturai, these people are associated with the patronage of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa temples in the local environs.

¹⁵ It is the equal of Nṛttamūrṭi.

animals and killed their keepers. According to Kulacēkarar, the event took place at a *divyakṣetra* called Tirunāṅkur in the Cōḷa country. To quote,

Kumpamiku matayāṇai pākaṇḍōṭuṅ kulaintu viḷa
Kompataṇaiṇ paṭṭerṭinta Kūṭṭaṇamarntuṇaiyumiṭam
... Nāṅkai (KPT 4.1.9)

“The virulent mad elephant along with its driver crumbled when its tusks were plucked out by the Dancer who is seated and resides at Nāṅkai”. The Lord is a Kūṭṭaṇ. Perhaps the ecstasy of killing the beast resulted in a natural dance (cf. the Nāyaṇmār who add that Śiva performed the dance at a time when his wrath would not subside even after killing the demon, Tārakaṇ – *Tēvāram* 4.14.4, Kalidos 1996: 21, 25). The elephants at the mercy of Kṛṣṇa were terrified and started roaring. The dancer is nicknamed Kuṛaikaḷar Kūṭṭaṇ, who wears anklets (PTM 10.1.9). Kṛṣṇa who killed Kaṁsa is none other than Kūṛṭṭu, the God of Death, i.e. Kāla according to Nammālvār (MOLI 7.6.10).¹⁶ (Seth 1976: Pl. XXXII).

Of all the dances of Kṛṣṇa, the most celebrated one is connected with Kāliyamardana (Seth 1976: fig. 35). Kāliya was a dreadful snake who lived in the Yamunā, preying on the innocent inhabitants of Gokula. Yamunā was the river with which the life of the people of Gokula (T. Kōkulam) was very much interwoven. It was the source of drinking water, the bathing ghat and the pond where the *gopīs* could play the *rāsakrīḍa* with Kṛṣṇa. The play is called *vilaiyāṭṭu*, sportive enactments, involving dance (TM 2.9.8). When the *gopīs* play in the waters of Yamunā, Kṛṣṇa threw mud on them and stole their garments. To quote,

Āṅṇiliruntu vilaiyāṭuvōṅkaḷai āṇu “river”
Cēṇṇāḷerintu valaitukiṇ kaikkōṇṭu cēṇu “mud”, *tukil* “apparel”

The sport of Kṛṣṇa in the Yamunā was a divine play and so the *aṣṭadīkṣpālakas* are present on the occasion to witness the event, *eṇṭicaiyōrum iraṇṇit toḷutēṭta* (TM 2.10.2) (Sotheby’s 1997: fig. 204). We shall return to this theme.

Kāliyamardana (Kāliya, the snake-demon, + *mardana* “crushing” or “destroying”) is a pan-Indian theme which associates Kṛṣṇa with dance. In iconographical illustrations, Kṛṣṇa stands on the hoods of Kāliya in dancing mode, most famous being the Cōḷa bronzes. The hymns of Ālvārs provide ample data to examine the theme from the iconological point of view. The name of the demon is Kāliyaṇ (TM 1.5.6, 3.9.7, NAC 4.4, 12.5, KPT 7.9, PTM 4.10.3, 5.1.10, 6.7.5). He is a *nākam* (*nāga*) “snake” (PTM 4.6.1) or *aravam* (CAN 86) or *pāmpu* (CAN 38) or *pūnākam* (PTM 8.10.8), a deadly snake. The hiding place of Kāliya is also noted as a *poṅkai* “pond” (CAN 38). It was full of poison, *viṭamkalanta* “mixed with poison” (CAN 38). The snake was also a deadly poisonous reptile (PTM 4.10.3). Kṛṣṇa pounced upon the hoods of Kāliya and danced (NAC 12.5) (Khandalavala 1958: fig. 141). The Dancer is Kūṭṭaṇ (NAC 4.4, PTM 3.3.1). The dancer performs *naṭṭam* or *niruttam* (NAC 12.5), *naṭam* (CAN 38, 86, PTM 4.2.2), *nāṭakam* (PTM 4.10.3) and *tūyanaṭam* “pure dance” (TM 1.5.6). (Fig. 6) Periyālvār adds,

¹⁶ Viewing Kṛṣṇa as Kūṛṭṭu is interesting. He was in fact Kāla “Time” who decided the fate of Kaṁsa, and the “God of Death”, dealing severely with the train of demons sent by the King of Mathurā. Kāliyamardana is called Kālanēmi-kāḷaṇ (CAN 38). Kālanēmi was a powerful demon who was reborn as Kaṁsa (Mani 1996: 382). Kṛṣṇa was a Kāla to Kālanēmi *alias* Kaṁsa.

Kāṇaka māmaṭuviṭ kālīyaṇucciyilē
 Tūyanaṭam payilum cuntaraveṇ ciṟuvā
 Tūyanaṭam payilum cuntaraveṇ ciṟuvā (TM 1.5.6)

“Thou, beautiful small boy; thou, beautiful small boy. You enact the immaculate dance on the top of Kālīya, lodged in a forest-pond.” It is said that Kṛṣṇa climbed a tree, called *kaṭampu* (NAC 4.4, PT PTM 4.2.2), and jumped upon Kālīya’s head (Randhawa 1960: Pl. IX). He trampled the head of Kālīya (KPT 7.9) and performed a number of dances, *palṇaṭam* (PTM 4.10.3), having landed on the reptile’s hood. Kālīya was terrified, *naṭunika* (PTM 5.1.10) “shivering”, by the Lord’s performance. It is humorously added that the Vittakaṇ “Root” (of Dance ?) pounced on Kālīya’s head from the top of a *kaṭampu* tree, played the *kuḷal* “flute” and presented a mock recital. To quote,

Kāyanīrpukkuk kaṭampēṇi kālīyaṇ
 Tiyaṇaṭtil cilampārkkap pāyntāṭi
 Vēyiṇ kuḷalūti vittakaṇāy niṇṇa
 Āyaṇvantāp pūccikāṭṭukinṇāṇ (TM 2.1.3) (fig. 11)

The phrase *pūccikāṭṭutal* is a satire.¹⁷ That is to say one may threaten to do (i.e. to kill Kālīya) but may not actually do it (Kālīya was not killed but asked to vacate). It is also added that Kṛṣṇa encountered Kālīya in a *tāmaraippoykai* “lotus pond”, pulled the reptile by its tail, jumped upon its hoods and stood on top (TM 2.10.3).

When a torrential rain battered Gokula, Kṛṣṇa lifted the Govardhana hill like an umbrella to offer protection to its inhabitants. The Āḷvārs repeat the idea that the Lord lifted the *kuṇṇu* “hill” (TM 3.4.4, KPT 7.9) or *perumalai*¹⁸ “big mountain” (MOLI 2.10.4) like a *kuṭai* “umbrella” (TM 5.1.8, PTM 3.1.8) (Archer 1957: Pl. 38). It was Kṛṣṇa’s tour de force and so the Lord himself is called a hill, *aṇṇakkuṇṇam niṇṇa toppāṇai* (PTM 4.3.7). The Govardhana is not a mere umbrella which protects one from rain but the sovereign white umbrella, symbolic of Kṛṣṇa’s reign. A decad (PT 3.5) is on the regal umbrella of Kṛṣṇa, *Kōvartaṇa meṇṇum koṇṇakuṭai* (cf. Vaudeville 1980: 5). While lifting the hill, he plays the *kuḷal* “flute” and feeds the cows, *kaṇṇukaḷ mēyttāṇ* (TM 3.4.4). Here the cows are symbolic of people of the world, the *paśu* of Śaiva Siddhānta, who seek refuge under the umbrella of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa lifted the hill sportively with the five fingers, posed like a blossoming flower, *viralaintum malaravaittu* (TM 3.5.7) (Seth 1976 Pl. XXV, Dallapiccola 1982: 51, fig. 48) (fig 7). Kṛṣṇa was a mastercraftsman because while lifting the hill, he presents the pot-dance. To quote,

Kuṇṇaṇāḷ maḷaikāttuk kuṭamāṭu kūṭṭaṇ (PTM 3.10.8)

It is also added that after having performed the miracle of lifting the hill, Kṛṣṇa joined with his fellow mates in the common place at Gokula and presented a group dance to celebrate the occasion. To quote,

¹⁷ This phrase is in usage today. Children are threatened by elderly people with changing the face into an ugly one or wearing a mask. If a mature person is threatened by somebody he may simply say, *eṇṇa pūcci kāṭṭuriya*, meaning he is not an immature one to be carried away by the threat.

¹⁸ *Malai* in Tamil is mountain and *maḷai* rain.

Kuṇrameṭuttu maḷaitaṭuttu ilaiyārōṭum

Maṇṇi kuravai piṇainta Māl eṇṇai māl ceytāṇ (PTM 11.1.1)

There is an erotic element in the theme (Khandalavala 1958: fig. 2). Māl stands for Viṣṇu and *māl* also means foul play or a sexual game. Perhaps, it denotes the *rāsakrīda* of Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs*. The Lord takes the epithet, Kūttā “Thou Dancer” (MOLI 7.6.2–3).

The erotic element in the cited passage would lead us to other important themes of the Kṛṣṇa mythology, dealing with *gopīvastrāpaharaṇa* and *rāsakrīda* (Hardy 1983: 83–85). Thematically both are different but have a common subject dealing with the damsels of Gokula, the *gopīs*. When the *gopīs* take a bath in the Yamunā, Kṛṣṇa steals their clothes, *vastrāpaharaṇa* (IM, IV: Pl. IV). When they mingle with him freely, the result is a group dance (cf. *kravai pinaital supra*) under the spell of eroticism. *Rāsakrīda* is a coveted theme of the Ālvārs. What the Lord performed was *kiṇṇai* (TM 2.9.11), enacted once upon a time, *paṇṇu*, thus adding an antique value to the motif. The theme is beautifully summarised by Periyālvār in a nutshell as follows:

pallāyar kulāṇaṭuvē

Kōlaccantāmaraiḱ kaṇ miḷirak

kuḷālūti yicaipāṭiḱ kuṇintu āyarōṭu āṭi

Ālittu varukiṇṇa vāyappiḷḷai (TM 3.4.7)

“The lad in the company of the *āyar* girls is brilliant with his red-lotus like eyes, plays the flute, tunes a melodious music and dances with his mates sportively”. Music is the food of love and Kṛṣṇa gave it excessively through his magic band, the *kuḷal* (Skt. *veṇu*). So, a *patikam* (TM 3.6) is on the *kuḷal* (cf. Kinsley 1979: 199). It is so interesting that the gist of the decad may be presented here:

1. When Kṛṣṇa plays the *kuḷal*, the flower-like eyes of *gopīs* are drenched with love-sick tears and that their honey-spilling braids (decked with flowers) are unmatted automatically (under the spell of a mad love). v. 1
2. The play of the flute was so enrapturing that the divine nymphs like Menakā, Tilottamā, Rāmbhā and Ūrvaśī fell swooning as they were dancing and singing. v. 4
3. Tumburu and Nārada forgot to play their favourite instrument, the *viṇā*, and the *kinnaras* abandoned their instrument, the *kinnara*, at the time when Kṛṣṇa played his flute. v. 5
4. The melody was so blissful that the inhabitants of *devaloka* came down to Āypāṭi (i.e. Gokula) to listen to the music of the pied-piper. v. 7
5. Birds evacuated nests and went flying around the *paṭukāṭu* “thick forest” where Kṛṣṇa was playing the flute. v. 8
6. The gazelles ignored pastures and with grass in mouth, the udder pouring milk, they were frozen like a painted figure. To quote,

Māṇ kaṇaṇkaḷ mēykai maṇantu

Mēynta pulluṇkaṭai vāyvaḷi cōra

Iraṇṭu pāṭuntulaṇ kāppurṭai peyarā

Elutu cittiraṇkaḷpōl niṇṇaṇavē (TM 3.6.9) (fig. 4)

(cf. Archer 1960: Pl. 74; Dallapiccola 1982: 155 fig.)

The Lord's flute-music pervades through the entire campus of Gokula, both within and without. The *ānirai* (TM 3.9.9) or *kōnirai* (TM 4.10.9) "flocks of cows" were enticed to begin with and the others to follow suit were the inhabitants, particularly the *gopīs* who were the sweethearts of Kṛṣṇa. The flute was a powerful weapon (Kalidos 1997b: 120–21, cf. Rawson 1991: 17, Roebuck 1991: 149–53) like a dart in the hands of the pied-piper of Gokula.

The field of action for Kṛṣṇa was the Brindāvana, the Garden of Eden, the land of elixir and immortality (*supra*). It strikingly contrasts with Śiva's *cuṭukātu* "burning yard (with corpses)" where eagles, jackals, owls and ghouls roam in search of corpses. The Āyapāi and forest around present a completely different picture. Āṇṭaḷ, the she-mystic, who is in love with Kṛṣṇa, says how romantic the setting of Gokula was. To quote,

Uṇkaḷpuḷakkatai tōṭṭattu vāviyuḷ
Ceṇkaḷunīr vāynekiḷntu āmpalvāy kūmpinākāṇ (PAV 14)

"In the garden of your (*gopīs*) backyard, the red-lily has opened its mouth (i.e. blossomed) and the water lily has closed its mouth (i.e. blossom returning to its status of bud)". Āṇṭaḷ goes to add,

Vanteṇkum kōḷi ālaittaṇakāṇ mātavip
Pantalmēl palkāl kuyiliṇaṇkaḷ kūvinākāṇ (PAV 18)

"The rooster is inviting and on the *mātavi* (a flowering plant) creeper, several types of cuckoo-like birds are making noise".

The forest of Kṛṣṇa is a *cōlai* "grove" where bees fly humming (*curumpamarcōlai* TMM 17, *vaṇṭalampumcōlai* TMM 32). It is full of flowering plants and ponds, *pūmpolilcūḷ* (PTM 1.9.7). It is frigid (*kuḷincōlai* PTM 1.9.8) with a lotus pond (*kamalaccuṇai* PTM 1.9.9) (Archer 1960: Pls. 89–90). Tirumaṇkai himself brings about a contrast between Śiva's forest of corpses (*piṇākalaṭu kāṭatunūḷ naṭamāṭu piṇṇaṇ* "He who dances in the forest of corpses" PTM 2.6.9) and Viṣṇu's forest, the heavenly abode of lush green and lovable creatures. According to the Āḷvārs, the garden of Kṛṣṇa is filled with the following plants: *kuvaḷai* (PTM 7.5.10), *aravintam* (PTM 3.4.5), *āmpal* (PTM 3.4.5), *kamuku*, *pālai*, *ceṇpakam* (PTM 5.10.4), *palā*, *cūtakam*, *vāḷai* (PTM 4.2.1), *puṇṇai* (PTM 5.1.5), *ilanīr* (PTM 5.2.2), *mātavi* (PTM 7.5.3), *alli* (PTM 7.5.10), *karumpu* (MOLI 6.5.6), *ceṇṇel* (MOLI 6.5.6) and so on.¹⁹ The *kuvaḷai* shows its eyes, *kumutam* its mouth and water lily its lotus-like face. To quote,

Kuvaḷai kaṇkāṭṭa nīril kumutam vāykāṭṭa
Allik kamala mukaṇkāṭṭum (PTM 7.5.10)
(cf. Jayakar n.d.: 72 fig., Pal 1986: fig. 2)

The Āḷvārs view the *divyakṣetras* as the *cōlai* of Kṛṣṇa. Māḷiruṇcōlai, for example, is a *cōlai* where bees fly humming, peacocks move around and cuckoo sings when the Cosmic Lord is standing. To quote,

¹⁹ These grow in places where water is available in plenty. The *cuṭukātu* of Śiva is a barren tract, devoid of any source of water. A number of other sweet-smelling flowers are associated with Viṣṇu. These are *mallikai* "jasmine", *pāṭiri*, *ukantivai*, *ceṇkaḷunīr*, *kurukkatti*, *inuvāṭi* and *kamukai*. A *decad* in TM (2.7) is an invitation to Kṛṣṇa to come and decorate himself with these flowers.

Vaṇṭṭamuralum cōlai mayiliṇamālum cōlai
 Koṇṭalteṇavum cōlai kuyiliṇamkūvum cōlai
 Aṇṭarkōṇamarum cōlai . . . (TMM 14)

The *mūlabera* in the Māliuñcōlai temple is standing and the references to the Lord seated in *cōlai* may be a pointer to the *utsavabera* during *udyānagamana* (visit to garden – Kalidos 1989: 222) or *Vasantotsava*, festival of the spring. The birds and animals which inhabit the garden of Kṛṣṇa are *mayil* “peacock” (PTM 3.5.2) or *mañṇai* (PTM 6.5.4), *aṇṇam* “swan” (PTM 3.5.2), *vaṇṭu* “bee” (PTM 4.2.3), *cenkāl-nārai* “red-legged crane” (PTM 5.1.5), *kuyil* “cuckoo” (PTM 6.5.2), *kīlī* “parrot” (MOLI 10.8.4) and so on. The *mayil* dances, *aṇṇams* hover around in batches and dance, *nārai* visits willingly, *kuyil* and *vaṇṭu* sing and *kīlīs* skip about (Archer 1960: Pl. 43). The Ālvārs, unlike Tirumūlar (Kalidos 1997a), very rarely talk of the symbols. Tirumaṅkai adds that the *aṇṇam* is the Scriptures, *aṇṇamākiya arumaraiikal* (PTM 5.1.9). The music that is generated is *kuriñci* (PTM 5.2.2), typical of the Tamil hill country where the ethos of the inhabitants is love-making and engaging in the excesses of conjugal intimacy (Kalidos 1976: 58).

Kṛṣṇa’s garden is a playground where he stages the *kṛīḍas*. He has 16,000 sweethearts (Dallapiccola 1982: 59, fig. 60), *patinārāmayiravar tēvimār* (NAC 7.9). They were all engaged in *jalakṛīḍa* in the waters of Gaṅgā, *kaṅkainir kuṭaintāṭum perumāl* (KTP 2.2). It is all the rhythm of dance which pervades through the *cōlai*, *eṇkum ātalōcai* (PTM 3.5.5). As they played (*vilaiyāṭṭu* PTM 3.8.8) there was a spontaneous overflow of the flood of love (*kātal vellam* PTM 3.8.8) (cf. Siegel 1978: 187). There was a pleasant blow of the southern breeze, *teṇṇal vantulavum* (PTM 4.5.7). In a romantic setting of the *cōlai*, the lovers joined in a group and performed the *kūttu kuravai kōttu* (PTM 7.8.8), *kūttu* and the *kuravai* mixed. They leap in bounds while playing, *tulli vilaiyāṭi* (PTM 10.5.7). And what is Kṛṣṇa at with the *gopīs*? Tirumaṅkai is puzzled, may be under the spell of a celibate monk,²⁰ and asks: *āyarkalōṭu eṇ vilaiyāṭukinrāy?* “what is it that you play with the *āyars*? (PTM 19.4.2) (fig. 9, 11). Kṛṣṇa catches hold of the damsel’s garment and gets rid of it, *tukil parri kīri* (PTM 10.7.5). He pulls the *gopīs* (Khandalavala 1958: fig. 219), holding their locks of hair.²¹ He dances and dances the *kuravai*, leading to a congress, *pinai* (PTM 10.8.9), sexual intercourse?²² The union is a heavenly harmony, comparable to the mingling of honey with milk which tastes like the ambrosia, *amutu*, heavenly food of the gods, *tēṇum pālum kaṇṇalum amutumākit tittittu* (MOLI 8.8.4). *Kaṇṇal* and *amutu* are not edible commodities but the Lord himself is as Nammālvār would see him, *kaṇṇalē yamutē* (MOLI 7.1.2). Āṇṭāl would confirm the same idea by the words, *amparamē taṇṇirē cōrē yaru maruntē* “Thou the Sky, thou the water, thou the food, thou the ambrosia” (PAV17). He is the Lord, Kūṭṭaṇ Kōvalaṇ, “the Dancer, the Cowherd” (MOLI 10.1.6).

²⁰ Actually he was not. He was married and could have renounced worldly life when he became a fully fledged mystic.

²¹ It is in Āṇṭāl’s NAC that the erotic theme acquired a naked expression (Kalidos 1997b). She enquires of the *śaṅkha* how sweet the Lord’s lips are? invites the Lord to squeeze her breasts, brimming with emotions for a physical manipulation, and feels the penetration in sexual intercourse. Āṇṭāl in NAC (4.11) uses the words; *kūṭal* “union”, *puṇṇaral* “copulation” and *uṇṇaral* “feeling the presence” (of the penetrating phallus of Viṣṇu). Cf. Kalidos 1997b: 117–38.

²² He teases the *gopīs* by destroying the play-houses they make during playtime (PTM 3.8.10) and carries away the balls that they play with (PTM 10.7.5); *ciṇṇil citaittu* “destroy playhouses”, *pantu paṇṇittu* “snatch the balls”.

The Lord's sweethearts may number several thousands but he is mad after Piṇṇai or Nappiṇṇai, the prototype of Sanskrit Rādhā. The Lord is Piṇṇai's husband, *maṇālaṇ* (TM 2.5.1) or *kēlvaṇ* (PTM 6.6.8) or *maṇavālaṇ* (PTM 6.6.9), an idea redundant in the hymns. Āṇṭāl says Nappiṇṇai is the daughter-in-law of Nantakōpālaṇ (PAV 13); *Nantakōpālaṇ marumakalē Nappiṇṇāy*. *Malarmakal* "Lady on Flower" (Śrīdevī), *Maṇmatantai* "Lady of the Earth" (Bhūdevī) and *Kulavāyarkoḷuntu* "Sprout of the family of Cowherds" are the foremost of the Lord's spouses (cf. Kaidos 1997b: 117–38). He is their *kēlvaṇ* "husband" (PTM 5.6.11). Piṇṇai was a beautiful maid. Her breasts were full and well shaped, *vārārum mulai* (PTM 4.4.4), tresses attractive (PTM 6.5.4) and look like those of a gazelle (PTM 9.10.4). While asleep, the pan-Indian tradition would find Śrīdevī near the Lord's head and Bhūdevī near the feet (cf. Parimoo 1983: 15, 25, Smith 1969: 1867–87). Āṇṭāl adds that the Lord has his mouth placed on the paps of Nappiṇṇai when he reclines, *Napiṇṇai koṅkaimēl vaittuk kiṭanta malarmārpa vāyitiravāy* (PAV 19). This is to point out that Nappiṇṇai was the mate in his *kāmalilās*. She, it seems, sleeps with the Lord and so Āṇṭāl invokes the dormant maid to get up (PAV 20). Nappiṇṇai is placed on a par with the Lord's *kōyilkāppāṇ* "temple keeper", *vācalkāppāṇ* "door keeper" (PAV 16), Nantakōpālaṇ (PAV 17) and the Lord himself (PAV 19–21) in her hymns, dedicated to the sleeping ones and their arousal (Kalidos 1990). Piṇṇai (*Maṇimēkalai* XIX: 65, *Cilappatikāram* XVIII) or Nappiṇṇai (*Ḥṇṇā Nāṇṇappatu* 22) appears earlier in pre-Pallava Tamil literature also. A typical Tamil idiom, she is identified with Śrīdevī (Subrahmaniyan 1990: 570).

Another typical Tamil idiom is the *kuṭakkūttu* that Viṣṇu performs. *Kuṭam* means pot. A theme, appearing in pre-Ālvār literature, it is associated with the dance of Viṣṇu in the *Maṇimēkalai* (VI: 7, XXIX: 390, 457). It is supposed to be one among the six *viṇōtakkūttus*, hilarious dances, and presented by Vāsudeva on the streets of Cō and fortress of Vāṇaṇ,²³ a great enemy of the gods. The late medieval commentators like Arumputavuraiyācīriyar and Aṭiyārkkunallār add that the dance was presented by Vāsudeva with pots, made of mud or metals or *pañcalokas* (Subrahmaniyan 1990: 283). The Ālvārs make use of the idiom to the maximum possible level and the theme is prolific in the *Nālāyiram*. The performer of the pot dance is a *Kō* (NAC 3.6) and so the King of Dancers (*supra*). The fact that *kuṭam* means pot is pointed out in a hymn (cf. Christie's 1974: 84 fig., Randhawa 1959: 26 fig.). In another context it is added that the dance is mixed with *kuṭam*, *kuṭaṅkalanta kūttaṇāy* "the Dancer who added *kuṭam*" (CAN 38). The word, *kalantu* "mix" or "add", confuses as it may stand for a particular type of dance like *kuravai* or *elli*. But *kuravai* is also linked with *kuṭam*, *kuravai muṇṇē kōttāṇai kuṭamātu kūttaṇāṇai* (PTM 2.5.4). Kāliyamardana, Govardhanadhāri, Santāna Gopāla or Gopāla, Kṛṣṇa who toppled the *mallas* "wrestlers", Trivikrama and Vaikuṇṭhamūrti are supposed to dance the pot. To quote:

Viṭaṅkalanta pāmpinmēl naṭampayinṇa nāṭaṇē

²³ Cō is Sonitapura and Vāṇaṇ, Bāṇa, an *asura*. He fought with Kṛṣṇa on account of his daughter, Uṣā who fell in love with Aniruddha, grandson of Kṛṣṇa and son of Pradyumna (Mani 1996: 43, 107). The slaughter of Bāṇāsura by the dancing Lord is extolled as follows:

... Īcan taṇ paṭaiyōṭuṅkilaiyōṭu

Mōṭa Vāṇaṇai yāyirantōḷkalun tuṇittavaṇ uṇaikōyil

Āṭuvāṇ ... (PTM 4.2.5)

The *sthala* is Nāṅkūr where the Lord cut the thousand shoulders of Bāṇāsura and shattered his army, supported by the flanks of Śiva. Bāṇa was an ardent devotee of Śiva and so both were allies.

Kuṭaṅkalanta kūttaṅ – Kāliyamardana (CAN 38)

“the Dancer who added *kuṭam* (in his recital) is the one who cultivated the dance, standing on the (head of) a poisonous snake”

... kuṭamāṭu kūttaṅ taṇṇai

Kōkuṭaṅkaḷ taḷarāmaḷ kuṇṇamēntik

kāttāṅ ... – Govardhanadhāri (PTM 2.5.4)

“the Dancer with pots, he protected the Gokula from distress by lifting the hill”

Tayiruṇṭu kuṭamāṭi ... – Santāna Gopāla (PTM 5.10.1)

“(You) eat curd and danced the *kuṭam*”

Kuṭamāṭik kōvalaṇāy ... – Gopāla

“Kōvalaṇ is the pot Dancer”

Kūttar kuṭameṭuṭṭāṭil Kōvintaṅ – Govinda (MOLI 4.4.6)

“the Dancer (if he) lifts the pots and dances (he is) Govinda”

Vaikuntaṅ/kōyilkoṇṭa kuṭakkūttavammāṅ – Vaikuṇṭhamūrti (MOLI 8.6.5)

“(the Lord) whose abode is Vaikuṇṭha (He) is the Father of pot dance”

Kuṭamāṭi yulakaḷanta ... – Trivikrama (PTM 10.10.4)

“(You) measured the worlds by performing the pot dance”

Kuṭamāṭi vimmaṇṇum viṇṇum kuluṅka yulakaḷantu

Naṭamāṭiya perumāṅ ... – Trivikrama (VIR 38)

The last cited hymn avers that the Lord Dancer performed the *kuṭam* and measured the worlds, shaking the earth and sky. These are clear pointers to the fact that *kuṭam* is a type of dance, associated with Viṣṇu’s various avocations. That the *kuṭam* is pot is further confirmed. The pots were mounted on the head while dancing. To quote,

cuḷalak/kuṭaṅkaḷ talaimi teṭuttuk koṇṭāṭi (PTT 31) (Figs. 10–11)

It means pots were mounted on the head, the dance performed with swift movements, maybe to the accompaniment of the playing of musical instruments (cf. Randhawa 1959: 26 fig., *Lalit Kala* 1990: Pl. XVI, fig. 5). It is also added that the pots were two in number, *kuṭa miraṇṭenti* (CTML 1. 24) (cf. *Lalit Kala* 1990: Pl. XVI, fig. 5) (fig. 10). A number of *sthalas* are associated with the pot dance. To quote:

Kuṭantaikkīṭanta kuṭamāt “the pot dancer who is reclining at Kuṭantai (Kurumbakoṇam)”

(NAC 13.2)

poḷilcūḷ Kuṭantaik kuṭamāṭi – Kurumbakoṇam (PTM 3.6.8)

Kuṭaṅkalantāṭik kuravai muṅkōtta kūttavemmaṭikaḷ – Māliaruṇcōlai (PTM 9.8.6)

Tamiḷ pāṭuvār kuṭamāṭuvār – Tirukkōṭṭiyūr

‘sing the Tamil (Scriptures) and dance the pot’ (PTM 9.10.9)

Kuṭamāṭu kūttaṅ – Tirumōkūr (MOLI 10.1.11)

Kuṭamāṭi (pot dancer of) Araṅkam (Śrīraṅgam) (PTM 5.5.6–7)

tayiruṇṭu kuṭamāṭu “eat curd and dance the pot” – Nantipuraviṇṇakaram (PTM 5.10.1)

These may refer to the fact that pot dances were performed in honour of the presiding gods of the various *sthalas* in the Tamil country in those times. The *kuṭam* that the Lord carries may be symbolic of the butterpot (cf. Christie's 1974: fig. 84, Randhawa 1959: 26 fig.), very common in the household of the *gopīs*. It may also symbolise the cosmic seeds, contained in a *pūṇakumbha* which Viṣṇu carries in rare iconic pieces. The Govardhanadhāri relief in Māmallapuram portrays Kṛṣṇa lifting the hill while a *gopī* (Nappiṇṇai ?) carries the pot (= *kumbha*) on her head which may be the forerunner of the pot motifs, appearing in later Indian miniature paintings, cited in the foregoing account. These pots may have something to do with the dances of *kuṭam* (cf. also Kalidos 1997b: Pl. XXXVIa, Yaldiz 1992: fig. 65), so vividly portrayed by the Ālvārs. Today a type of folk dance, called *karakāṭṭam* (*karakam* "pot") is popular in the Tamil country which may be reminiscent of *kuṭakkūttu*. The motif was appropriated by the Nāyaṇmār for Śiva's dance (Kalidos 1996: 24–25) and the Lord is viewed in Harihara form while doing this. Naḷḷāru, a Śaiva *sthalā*, is the venue where Harihara dances (cf. the interesting figure in Sotheby's 1997: fig. 182).

The most illuminating picture of a dancing form is that of Śeṣaśāyī, the reclining one. The *cayaṇattār*, one in *sayana*, was the *neyyāṭinār* (cf. n. 2) and was admired by the *aṇṭar*, the cosmic beings (TM 1.1.5). The hymn adds, *āṭukavē āṭukavē* "dance, O, you dance". Another hymn is in praise of *Paḷḷikol-maṇavālar* "the groom who reclines" through the ages, *paṇpala kālamum*, to the rhythm of dancing peacocks, representing Kaṇṇapirāṇ (Kṛṣṇa) (NAC 10.6). It has been earlier pointed out that both Śeṣaśāyī and Śiva-Naṭarāja are on the same plane philosophically (Kalidos 1997a). The Ālvārs further confirm the proposition.

Apart from these familiar motifs of dance *vis-à-vis* the various iconographical forms of Viṣṇu, there is an enigmatic theme. To quote:

Mūttavaikāṇa mutumaṇar kuṇṇṇṇi
Kūttu uvantāṭik kuḷalālicaipāṭi
Vāyṭta maṇaiyōr vaṇaṅka (TM 1.9.8)

Mūttavaikāṇa would mean to be witnessed by forerunners in the field (i.e. dance). Then the Lord moves upon a sand dune and gives a dance recital to the tune of *kuḷal* and was adored by the *maṇaiyōr* "Vedis". It is clearly a dance motif but the context of presentation is not understood. It may pertain to several of the types noted in the *Cilappatikāram*, rooted in Tamil cultural tradition.

The presiding gods of the celebrated *divyakṣetras* are visualized in dance forms. The following, for example, may be noted:

Tiruvilaiyātu tiṇṇōḷi Tirumāḷiruṇcōlai nampi (NAC 9.3)
"Present your holy recital, (My) Lord of Tirumāḷiruṇcōlai"

Āṭum karuṭakkoṭiyuṭaiyār – Vēṇkaṭam (NAC 10.5)
"the Dancer who holds the Flag of *Garuḍa*"

(Note: *āṭumkaruṭaṇ* would mean dancing *Garuḍa-supra*) (Cf. Fig. 5)

Āṭukūttan – Vēṇkaṭam (PTM 2.1.9) "the dancing Dancer"

Payiṇṇatarāṅkam tirukkōṭṭi paṇṇāḷ
Payiṇṇatam vēṇkaṭamē paṇṇāḷ payiṇṇa
... nirmalai (TII 46)

“Arāṅkam, Tirukkōṭṭiyūr, Vēṅkaṭam (Tirupati) and Tirunīrmalai: where the Lord cultivates the dances, learns for so many aeons and dances”.

Summing up the findings of the study, it may be added that there are clear motifs, portraying the Dance of Viṣṇu in the hymns of the Ālvārs which seem to be the base for the later plastic and pictorial illustrations. The pan-Indian motifs so far recognized in respect of Viṣṇu are only those connected with Kṛṣṇa (cf. a recent account: Pal 1997). Apart from these, there are several others which the present study has brought to scholarly attention. These idioms, typical of the Tamil *bhakti* tradition, have their roots in the *Cilappatikāram*, an epic of the pre-Pallava period. The Ālvārs have given a new imagery to the Dance of Viṣṇu, elevating him to the status of Naṭarāja, unique in religious and art history. In course of a historical cross-current, the vision-*kāñci* of the Ālvārs had an impact on the later Vaiṣṇava philosophers all over the subcontinent (Basham 1971: 332–37) and poets like Jayadeva of Bengal whose *Gītagovinda* provided the base for the Indian miniature paintings (Randhawa 1960, Archer 1960, Khandalavala 1958, Bautze 1983) wherein we find the two polarities of the *cuṭukātu* of Śiva-Naṭarāja and the *cōlai* of Viṣṇu-Naṭarāja, and the dancing Lords at the acme of their glory. In justification of the epithet, Viṣṇu-Naṭarāja, the Ālvārs offer ample clues; e.g. Kūttātavallavenkō, Kūttavappaṇ, Āṭuvār (= Āṭavallāṇ), Catirmūrtti and Āṭarpaṇavai. In a literature of encyclopaedic range, the Ālvārs had used a number of terminologies, meaning dance. They are *āṭṭam*, *naṭam*, *kūttu*, *kirīṭai*, *vilaiyāṭṭu*, *catir* and *nāṭakam*. Specific dance types such as *marakkāl*, *kuravai*, *elli*, *ceṅkīrai* and *cappāṇi* are recorded. These have roots in the antique Tamil tradition as there seems to have prevailed *palnaṭam* “several (types of) dances”. Interestingly, all stand in association with the multifarious forms of Viṣṇu. The stage where the Lord presented his enactment is variously called *maṇṇam*, *araṅkam*, *kūṭam*, *paṭukātu*, *cōlai* and *kāṇakam*. The pan-Indian iconographical tradition has made known only three basic modes of the images of Viṣṇu. They are *sthānaka*, *āsana* and *sayana*. The Ālvārs add *naṭantu*, *paṇantu*, *kuṇintu* and *naṭam*. So, by about the sixth century A.D. the Dance of Viṣṇu was almost an accepted norm theoretically. The core ideas of the early Ālvārs continued to proliferate under the middle and later group, especially under Nammālvār, Periyālvār, Āṇṭāl and Tirumaṅkai. In addition to Kāliyamardana and *rāsakriḍa*, the Ālvārs find Nṛsimha, Aṣṭamukhagaṇḍhabheruṇḍa-Nṛsimha, Varāhamūrti, Vāmana-Trivikrama and Śeṣaśāyī as dancers. Several of the forms of Kṛṣṇa get linked with dance. These include Santāna Gopāla, Gopāla, Govinda, Yamalārjunabhaṅga, Kuvalayapiḍa-vadham, Kaṁsa-vadham, Kāliyamardana, *jalakriḍa* in the Yamunā or Gaṅgā, *kāmalilās* with *gopis*. Gopīvastrāpaharaṇa, Govardhanadhāri and so on. The enigmatic motif of the “sand dune dance” is a problem to reckon with. *Kuṭakkūttu* is an important theme which goes in association with several of the forms of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa especially. And the presiding Lords of a few of the *divyakṣetras* are viewed in dancing modes. All these facets of the Dance of Viṣṇu, and both the plastic and pictorial evidence, support the thesis that Viṣṇu is Naṭarāja.

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Appendix

Frequency of dance motifs in Nalāyiram

Excepting three (viz., Pēy, Maturakavi and Tiruppāṇ) all others have appropriated the dance motifs in visualizing the personality of Viṣṇu. The literary works which fail to include dance themes are TII (100), ACI (7), NAN (96), PAL (12), KAN, AMA, ELU and TVK. The absence of dance motifs in these works may be quite accidental and not due to any ideologically oriented deliberate omission. The Ālvārs, belonging to chronological groups (*vide*, table below) had made use of the theme. Nearly 200 references on the subject are on record; the bulk of which goes to the credit of Tirumaṅkai (90), Nam (44), Periya (40) and Āṇṭāl (10). Poykai, Pūtam, Kulacēkarar, Toṇṭaraṭi and Tirumaḷicai show a low figure, less than five each. The Middle Ālvārs add importance to the subject, rooted in the Early group, and very much popularized by the Later Ālvārs. Nammālvār of the Middle group evinced a keen interest, later vigorously popularized by Tirumaṅkai and Periyālvār. Āṇṭāl fails to talk about the dances in PAV but exploits it in the NAC, an erotic piece of work. This might add an erotic value to the dance theme itself as earlier pointed out. Having its origin during the 5th–6th century, the theme reaches its high watermark in the 8th–9th century. It was around this period that the Śiva-Ṇaṭarāja cult at Citamparam was gaining strong ground. The Vaiṣṇavas popularising the Viṣṇu-Ṇaṭarāja cult may have a historical justification from the perspective of a competition with their rival Śaiva cultists. If Śiva-Ṇaṭarāja could gain an upper hand over the Tillai-Kāḷi by defeating her in a dance contest (Kalidos 1996a), the Vaiṣṇavas could as well borrow the dance motif with the spirit of a sport or

competition. If Śiva is Āṭavallāṇ, Viṣṇu is then Kūttāṭavallaveṅkō. If Śiva performs the *tinuṭṭaiyāṭṭu*, Viṣṇu could do it as well. If Śiva as Naṭarāja could enact *ānandatāṇḍavam*, Kṛṣṇa as Kāliyamardana could perform the same *tāṇḍava* (figs. 1–2), the former footed on Apasmāra and the latter Kāliya. If the Śiva-*gaṇas* could sing and dance with their Lord, Viṣṇu is *iṇṇicaiyāṇavaṇ* and the Dwarf Vāmana could present his own *kūttukal*. In Indian tradition philosophical arguments, *vātu* (Rajajaran 1997a: 25), played a vital role in settling sectarian disputes (e.g. Śāṅkara vs. Kumārila-bhaṭṭa and the Jains of Maturai vs. Nāṇacampantar). It seems dance as a performing art had the same effect, later inducted into the realm of the plastic and pictorial arts.

Table

chronological group of Ālvārs	root word (e.g. <i>kūttu</i>)	epithets after dance (e.g. Kūttan)	stage (e.g. <i>arāṅkam</i>)	iconographical forms (e.g. Nṛsiṃha)	Total
I (5th–6th)	*	—	—	*	2
II (7th–8th)	*3	*5	*2	*7	17
III (8th–9th)	*5	*2	*5	*9	31

* = 1–5 samples; *² = 6–10; *³ = 16–20; *⁵ = 21–25; *⁷ = 31–35; *⁹ = 41–45.



Figure 1



Figure 3



Figure 2



Figure 4

For captions, see page 247.



Figure 5

1. Dancing Viṣṇu (*ānandatāṇḍavam* lifting right leg), Keśava temple, Somanāthapura.
2. Dancing Viṣṇu (*ānandatāṇḍavam* usual mode, Cōla type), Keśava temple, Somanāthapura.
3. Dancing Nṛsiṃha, Yādava period, Stray piece, Prathiṣṭhānapure.
4. Cows attracted by the music of Veṇugopāla's flute (reproduced from Dallapiccola *et al.* 1982).
5. Gajendramokṣa, Viṣṇu on *Garuḍa* (note the celestial bird's dance-like movement), Chenna-Keśava temple, Belūr.
6. Dancing Kṛṣṇa, Tañcāvūr Nāyaka period painting on ceiling of early medieval rock-cut temple for Viṣṇu, Malaiyaṭṭipatti.



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

For captions, see page 249.



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

7. Govardhana (Kṛṣṇa hält den Berg Govardhana über seine Freunde. Bild der "kleinen" *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*-serie. Einem Meister der ersten Generation nach Nainsukh zugeschrieben, um 1780/85. Geschenk Lucy Rudolph). Courtesy: Museum Rietberg Zürich.
8. Varāhamūrti's encounter with Hiraṇyākṣa (Varāha wird vom Dämonen Hiraṇyākṣa verwundet. Blatt aus der "kleinformatigen" *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*-serie. Manaku von Guler zugeschrieben, um 1740. Geschenk Balthasar und Nanni Reinhart). Courtesy: Museum Rietberg Zürich.
9. Dancing Kṛṣṇa (cf. figs. 1–2). (Kṛṣṇa tanzt um zu gefallen. Blatt aus der *Gīta-Govinda*-serie von 1730. Manaku von Guler zugeschrieben. Geschenk Balthasar und Nanni Reinhart). Courtesy: Museum Rietberg Zürich.

10. Kṛṣṇa dancing with *gopīs* (note the *kuṭam* 'pot' in hand), called Ragini Vasanta, Raghugarh, A.D. 1775–1800. © Klaus & Barbara Fussman.
 11. Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs*, called Ragini Vasanta, Rajasthani miniature.
 12. Aṣṭamukha-gaṇḍhabheruṇḍa-Nṛsimha, Nāyaka painting, Nṛsimha chapel, Śrīraṅga-nātha temple, Śrīraṅgam © R.K.K. Rajarajan.
- Nos. 7–12 were taken from photo-copies by R.K.K. Rajarajan.